

# CORRESPONDENCE

## Family Allowances

*To the Editor, Eugenics Review*

SIR,—The scheme for an indiscriminating State payment of five shillings a week for every child seems to overlook the experience of the similar Spenhamland system described in Waters's *Economic History of England*. Each birth added 1s. 6d. to the weekly allowance, the illegitimate birthrate rose rapidly, and the rural population lost every incentive to good work, thrift, or temperate living. The employer-farmers were, in effect, subsidized from the rates, which became crushing. A greatly over-populated countryside resulted, most inhabitants drawing poor relief.

Human nature changes little. So similar results from the scheme of Mrs. Hubback and Miss Rathbone (*vide* her recent book *The Case for Family Allowances*) seem probable, viz., a rapid increase of the poorest classes. These do not go in for family limitation. They would be largely maintained by taxation of the self-supporting classes. This would increase the tendency of the latter to avoid having children, though such children are the kind the nation most requires. Employers not unlikely would reduce wages or withhold legitimate increases, especially for unskilled workers not protected by strong trade unions. Many wage-earners would reduce by the amount of the family allowances the sum they give for house expenses, and spend on themselves the money saved.

One reason adduced for family allowances is a need to increase the birthrate, at present below replacement level. As the population of this densely crowded country has increased by several millions since the last war, and millions are normally unemployed, a reduction in population would seem an advantage.

The Charity Organization Society handles poverty from expert knowledge, and its opinion (*vide* *How to Help Cases of Distress*) is as follows: "Large families of young children may readily fall into distress. But a system of family allowances will not meet the perennial difficulty of assisting the man who is a low wage-earner and who has a large family without making assistance more attractive to him than employment. Nor will family allowances adequately and suitably relieve cases of distress; this for the reason that they are to be automatic. . . . An automatic scale will not settle the problem of poverty; that can only be settled by careful case-work, by taking each case on its own merits."

It is certainly essential that every child be adequately fed. But on the above-quoted experience and opinions an indiscriminate family allowance for each child, or even for each child

after the first or second, paid whether the family needs it or not—and probably the majority of families do not—appears wasteful and demoralizing. Careful dealing with each case on its own merits seems soundest.

London.

J. P. BRANDER.

*To the Editor, Eugenics Review*

SIR,—The movement for family allowances is really a mixture of two different movements which have nothing in common except their name.

Fifty years ago Jane Hume Clapperton (*Scientific Meliorism*) and G. A. Gaskell demanded what they called "Endowment of Mothers." They held that motherhood was a public service and should be paid for directly, instead of leaving the mother to beg from her husband. They had no desire, however, to stimulate the birthrate; on the contrary they were fervent neomalthusians.

This original aim has been overlaid by another, viz., a desire to stimulate the birthrate. Just before the war the Fabian Society published *Parenthood and Poverty* by Louis Ginsburg, who says "Protagonists of the family allowance almost invariably consider allowances paid only to children after the third" (p. 43). On the same page he says: "An allowance should be granted of 7s. per week for every dependent child in excess of three."

We have thus two distinct programmes masquerading under the same name. One set of people would give an allowance to every mother. The other set would endow only a small minority of mothers, those who have more than three children. The great majority of mothers, instead of getting anything, would probably have to pay heavier taxes on their tea and sugar.

Finally I would point out the extraordinary folly of trying to stimulate the birthrate before we know how many people we shall be able to support after the war. Mr. Colin Clark has shown that Britain has a much higher standard of life than any other densely populated country. That standard is wholly due to our immense export trade of manufactured goods which we send all over the world, obtaining food and raw materials in exchange. Destroy that export trade and we sink to the level of Italy or Japan. Who can possibly say what export trade we shall have after the war?

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*To the Editor, Eugenics Review*

SIR,—Mr. Brander's and Mr. Kerr's letters deal between them with so many points that they require an article in reply. I will, however, try to deal with at least some of the points, and refer the correspondents to Miss Rathbone's Penguin on